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FORTUNES WASHED AWAY

**A Series of
Dramatizations
of Better
Land Use**

No. 123 August 31, 1940 1:15 p.m.

"EDMUND RUFFIN - AGRICULTURIST"

W·L·W CINCINNATI

**United States Department of Agriculture
Soil Conservation Service
Dayton · Ohio**

LIBRARY
Soil Conservation Service
U. S. Department of Agriculture
Washington, D. C.

SOUND: Thunder and rain...

ANNOUNCER

Fortunes Washed Away!

ORGAN THEME: I GET THE BLUES WHEN IT RAINS.

ANNOUNCER

Eighty years ago, the first gray of an April morning silhouetted Fort Sumter against the eastern sky. Night still darkened the waters of the bay. An old man stood there, his long white locks hanging down upon the shoulders of a homespun coat. A signal gun flashed from Fort Johnson on the southern shore. Then...

SOUND: Boom of cannon...

ORGAN: Up and rising...

ANNOUNCER

Fort Sumter had been fired upon! With pallid face, with tear-dimmed gray eyes, an old man, old in the service of his country in peace and in war, had pulled the lanyard!

ORGAN: Up and out...

ANNOUNCER

The old man's name was Edmund Ruffin. Few know him as the man who fired the first shot upon Fort Sumter, few know him as America's outstanding agriculturist. But a monument to Edmind Ruffin remains behind...not a monument of marble, nor brass, nor concrete, nor steel. It is the soil of this country. Young Edmund Ruffin, just turned nineteen, took over the responsibilities of a planter...(fade)

RUFFIN (fading in)

....and so, Susan, my dear young bride...

SUSAN

A bride...and mistress of a great plantation.

RUFFIN

Great? Yes, perhaps great, once upon a time. But the land you see before you, my dear, is the accumulations of two centuries of improper tillage. You can't see the land that has been washed away.

SUSAN

You say, improper, Edmund?

RUFFIN

Improper is the word. Our plows are poor, but our plowing methods are poorer. Look across the valley, Susan...and you can see how the farmers are cutting shallow furrows up and down the hills. (SIGHS). Well, you can see what we're up against.

SUSAN

I can understand. Here is a plantation that has been farmed by your family generation after generation. And I can agree with you on one score...they haven't used it kindly.

RUFFIN

No, by no means.

SUSAN

And yet, it's no worse than those around us.

RUFFIN

That's the pity of it! The Virginians have been negligent in the care of the land. New land is taken up, tobacco grown on it for three or four years, then Indian corn as long as any will come...

SUSAN

...and then, when the soil is worn out, they begin again with a new piece. And when that's gone...move west.

RUFFIN (with determination)

But I won't! I tell you, this is my home...our home. (THEN SADLY).
But even so, we're living in a world of eroding fields and retreating forests. Acres growing weary, falling from cultivation, and returning to forests.

SUSAN

And the very condition of the land is reflected in the people, Edmund. Have you noted how many planters are fraying a bit at the cuffs, out at the elbows, down at the heels...

RUFFIN

And then they grow bitter and cry about low prices. But here, Susan! We're growing morbid. We're young, we have strength....

SUSAN

And we have each other.

RUFFIN

Yes, each other. And we have our land. We'll find a way to build up these weary acres! Still....(fade out)

SOUND: Banjo plunking faintly in background...

RUFFIN

Well, Jem...you've been around these parts about as long as I have. You're 24, aren't you?

JEM (with negro dialect)

I don't know as I can say, Massa Ruffin. My mammy she never told me.

RUFFIN

But you've been here long enough to see that the prospects for a young planter are gloomy indeed.

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JEM

I can she see that. This here land is gettin' tattery, full of briars, and no one that I can recollect seems to know what to do about it.

RUFFIN

We must do something...or move west. I've noticed the other planters, too...they plod on, but their persistence is more mechanical than courageous.

JEM

You mean, suh, that the planters are losing out?

RUFFIN

Look at my own case, Jem. I've moved from experiment to experiment. My crop rotations don't bear fruit, because clover and the other legumes just won't grow on poor lands. There ought to be some way to make them grow!

JEM

They used to grow, Massuh. These lands used to be the best in Prince George county...my mammy told me that, anyhow.

RUFFIN

Ah, I was an optimistic lad when I took over the reins five years ago. The optimism of youth, and the reading I did! And I've done a lot of experimenting, to...(THEN DROPPING HIS EXUBERANT TONE).... but failure just dogs my steps. After three years, my best land became so poor I had to abandon it. Clover won't grow...but, I'm still trying.

JEM

Iffen ah may say so, ah hope you'll never quit trying. Ah'd like to see some of these old slaves around here change their saucy tone. They tell me that the land in this here part of Virginia jest cain't be riched up.

RUFFIN

Yes, the planters smile in, shall we say, tolerance...at my experiments. Now, they're beginning to say "I told you so." Even I'm ready to admit that I've failed.

JEM

Don't admit it, suh! Don't admit it.

RUFFIN

You're right, Jem...there must be some way...some way to build up this land.

ORGAN: Mournful music behind...

ANNOUNCER

Oh, it seemed that an angel of desolation had cursed the land. Escaping raindrops, laden with grit, rushed down the slopes, ripping out nasty-looking gullies, down to bedrock. Farm after farm wore out, washed and gullied, dreary and uncultivated. Southern agriculture was a panorama of barren and exhausted soil, half-clothed negroes, lean and hungry stock, houses falling into decay, fences dilapidated.

ORGAN: Fade out gently...

ANNOUNCER (cold)

But Edmind Ruffin kept working, kept experimenting. He refused to admit that...he had failed.

SOUND: Meat frying in pan....

RUFFIN (fading in)

...Mmm! What's that I smell? Can't be good old Virginia ham? Let's have...

SUSAN

Get away from there! You'll have your dinner in due time.

RUFFIN

But I'm starved!

SUSAN

And you'll stay starved if you don't get away from here.

RUFFIN

Then here I go away.

SOUND: Meat frying gradually fading out...

RUFFIN

Hey! What'd you take the meat off, for?

SUSAN

Edmund, I want to talk to you.

RUFFIN (dropping his carefree tone)

Oh?

SUSAN

Is it true what you told Jem Sykes...that the land is worse than it was when we came here?

RUFFIN (deliberately)

Yes, it is true. We might as well face facts. The farm's washed up.

SUSAN

Then you've really made up your mind to migrate west?

RUFFIN

I hate to admit it, Susan. Even today, I was reading this copy of Davy's "Agricultural Chemistry"...thought I might find out something about the soil....was reading right over here...

SUSAN (patiently)

Still reading...and experimenting...

RUFFIN

Well, I didn't expect to find out much. It's just about....here!

What's this!

SUSAN

Yes?

RUFFIN

Listen to this...."sterile soils containing acid matter---may be improved by the application of quicklime..." Do you understand, Susan?

SUSAN

No, frankly, I don't.

RUFFIN

Look. I've noticed that sorrel and pine grow on poor lands. Now, maybe acids are to blame for our sterile soils. Now, if that's true....

SUSAN

...you'll put quicklime on the sterile soils!

RUFFIN

Not quicklime, exactly...but a form of lime. This neighborhood is rich with common fossil shells...and they're nothing more than marl, a form of lime. Susan...there's the answer to our poor, eroded fields. There's why we can't grow legumes. Those fields need lime!

ORGAN: SINGING IN THE RAIN, behind....

ANNOUNCER

Oh, eagerly Edmund Ruffin awaited the result of his latest experiment, and it bore fruit. At harvest time the marled ground yielded an advantage of forty percent. Carts went back to the marl pits. Fields took on new life. A new era in agriculture dawned. Edmund Ruffin would save the Old South!

ORGAN: UP AND OUT.

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SUSAN (fading in)

....and read this, Edmund!

RUFFIN

You read it to me, Susan.

SUSAN

Too excited to read it, yourself?

RUFFIN

I suppose so. All these notices....

SUSAN

Here's what it says, anyhow. The editor says it is the "first systematic attempt by a plain, practical farmer to examine the soils that he has to cultivate." And he says he's going to print an extra edition of this issue and send it, free, to farmers all over the country. Oh, I'm so proud!

RUFFIN

I am too, Susan...not because of anything I've done, but because I believe we've finally found a way to build up sterile soils. Lime! Now we'll get clover to grow!

SUSAN

And one man called your essay on liming "the most thorough piece of work on a special agricultural subject ever published."

RUFFIN

Oh, exaggeration!

SUSAN

Well, President John Tyler wasn't exaggerating when he hung your picture over his mantel, alongside of that of Daniel Webster. Edmund Ruffin, the greatest American agriculturist!

ORGAN: Mournful music behind...

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of the *Journal of the American Medical Association* (JAMA) and the *British Medical Journal* (BMJ) are the most widely read and cited medical journals in the world. The *JAMA* is published weekly, while the *BMJ* is published weekly in print and online. Both journals are owned by their respective medical associations. The *JAMA* is published by the American Medical Association (AMA), and the *BMJ* is published by the British Medical Association (BMA). Both journals are peer-reviewed and contain a wide range of medical research, clinical practice, and public health information. The *JAMA* is known for its high standards of scientific rigor and its focus on clinical research. The *BMJ* is known for its focus on public health and its commitment to open access. Both journals are essential reading for medical professionals and researchers alike.

ANNOUNCER

Oh, there was something both pathetic and inspiring about this youth, amid the jeers of his neighbors, patiently studying, carefully running his tests over and over again. But the way was not clear. Every new move was whispered from farmer to farmer, to be laughed over when men gathered together. His marl pit was known as "Ruffin's Folly." But Edmund Ruffin continued his experiments, served in the Virginia legislature, became president of the Virginia Agricultural society...(fade)

SOUND: Door opens and closes...

JEM

Can ah help you, massa Ruffin?

RUFFIN

If you'd like to listen...and keep quiet.

JEM

Yessuh...ah'll keep just as still as a mouse...a little mouse.

RUFFIN

All right, see that you do.

JEM

Yessuh. (PAUSE) What you doing with them bottles, massa?

RUFFIN

These are test tubes, Jem. I'm studying the composition of soils.

JEM

Composition? Is they many of them?

RUFFIN

Never mind, Jem. I've just returned from Mount Vernon. You don't know it, I suppose, but Washington kept studying better farming methods. Yet you can't imagine a more perfect agricultural ruin than his farms are today. Thomas Jefferson closed his days at Monticello in poverty...his fields and markets had failed him.

JEM

That ain't going to happen here. Ah heard men talking about you.

RUFFIN

Me?

JEM

Yessuh, they say farmers was losing heart around here, until you showed them how good lime was for the soil.

RUFFIN

Well, we don't hear any more about them migrating to the West. Farmers who left worn out fields are returning to find good crops taking the place of "hen's grass."

JEM

Ah was down in South Carolina while you was gone. Down there they used't to talk about "Ruffin's Folly." But now, suh, they say you is a great man.

ORGAN: Discordant music....

ANNOUNCER

Then...came...war!!! After his symbolic shot at Fort Sumter, Edmund Ruffin, an old, old man, retired from action. But invading armies destroyed his home, Marlbourne, tore up the fences, burned the trees, dammed the drainage ditches. in 1864....

JEM

The guests are leaving, Massa Ruffin. You must try to get some rest.

RUFFIN

Rest? Oh, yes...but how can I rest? My poor daughter, Mildred, dead...in far off Kentucky. Mildred....

SOUND: Gentle knock on door...

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1. The first group of people who are likely to be affected by the proposed project are the local residents who live in the vicinity of the project site. These residents may be affected by the project in a number of ways, including increased traffic, noise, and air pollution. The project may also affect the local economy by creating jobs and increasing the demand for goods and services. The project may also affect the local environment by increasing the demand for water and electricity, and by increasing the amount of waste generated.

JEM

Ah'll see who it is. Please try to rest.

SOUND: Door opens. whispers. Door closes...

JEM (hoarsely)

Massa Ruffin.

RUFFIN

Yes?

JEM

They's something you must know.

RUFFIN

Yes?

JEM

Your son, Massa Julian...

RUFFIAN

Julian?

JEM

Massa Julian has been killed in battle.

RUFFIN

Julian? Oh. Please leave me, Jem.

JEM

Yassuh.

SOUND: Door opens and closes...

RUFFIN

SOBS BITTERLY.

ORGAN: Funeral march, softly behind....

ANNOUNCER (gently)

A few words penned in his diary. The ink had scarcely dried. The sound of the carriage on the road died in the distance.

SOUND: Revolver shot...

ANNOUNCER

The weary old soldier had gone home.

SOUND: Taps, played on bugle, thru to end.

ANNOUNCER

Thus passed Edmund Ruffin, an old, old soldier who gave the science of soil chemistry to America. They laughed at Ruffin, but the soil he saved through patient years of experiments, is his monument. Today, modern soil conservation methods everywhere depend upon the principles first applied in America by Edmund Ruffin.

ORGAN: UP AND OUT.

ANNOUNCER

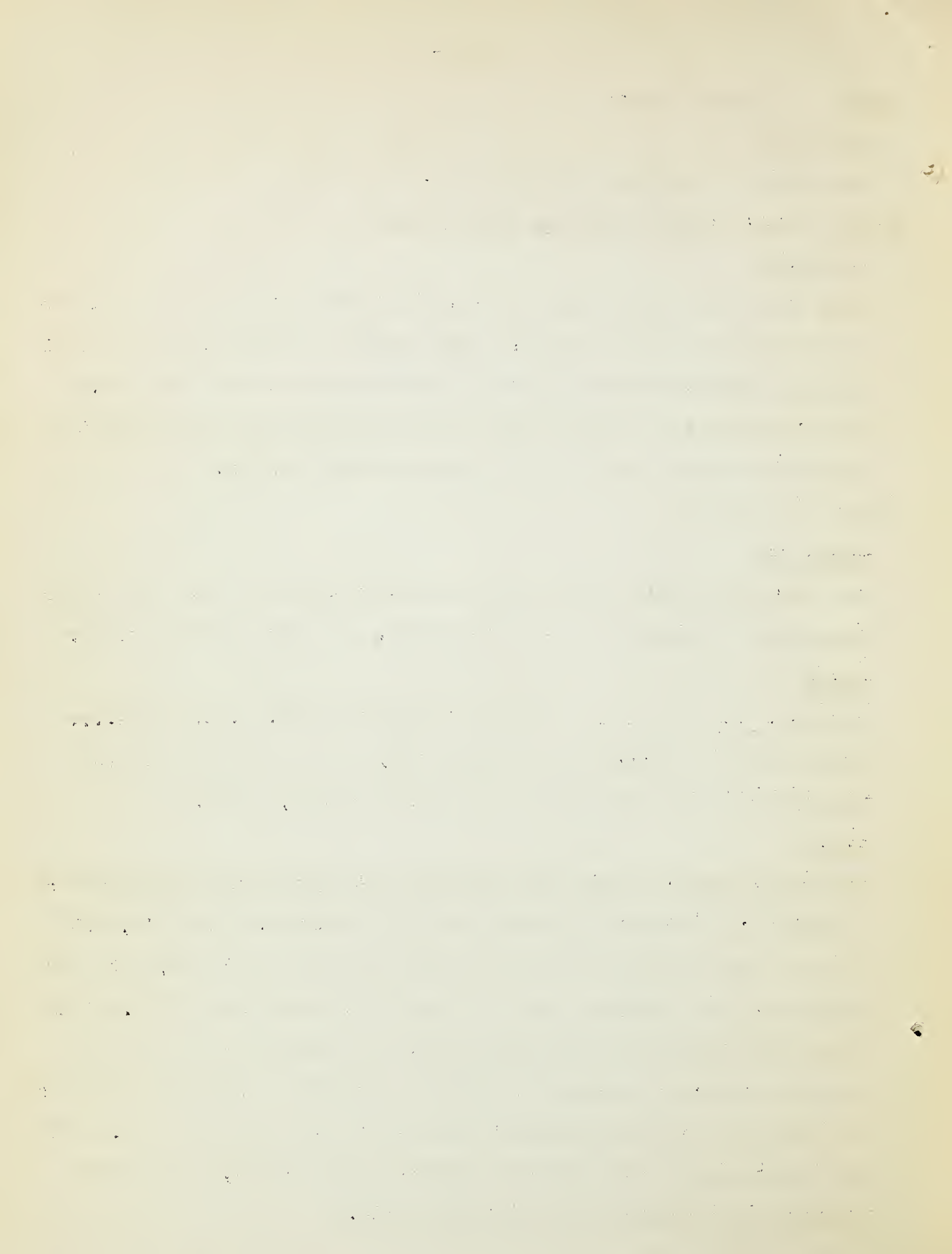
And now, once again we turn to the Soil Conservation Service of the United States Department of Agriculture, and here is Ewing Jones.

JONES

Thanks, _____, and with us again is Dr. W. S. Ligon.... Billy Ligon to you...our soil scientist, for another one of his friendly lessons about our soil. If you please, Billy.

LIGON

All right, Ewing. Don't get the idea that agricultural limestone is a cure-all. It isn't a substitute for fertilizer. It isn't, but it is a soil amendment that is needed badly on most lands, not only croplands, but pastures and meadows, here in the Ohio Valley. Lime acts both chemically and mechanically. It quickens the decay of organic matter. It also breaks up the dormant or insoluble elements of inorganic matter and renders them available for plant food. And it loosens heavy clay land and makes it more friable, and gives cohesion and firmness to light sandy soils.



JONES

That's a pretty good indorsement for lime, Billy...but I imagine that a lot of folks are wondering just why all this hullabaloo about liming at this time of year. You know, most farmers lime their fields in the spring.

LIGON

And that's just a custom...a custom that often adds to the confusion of a busy season on the farm, with the result that many times the lime isn't applied at all. It can't be obtained on time, or rain delays the spring program, so that something must remain undone...and liming is often that something.

JONES

Then the solution should be fall and winter liming.

LIGON

Exactly...because then dirt roads are harder, drier, and less rutty, and the materials can be hauled quicker and easier. In the same way, the fields are easier to travel over in the fall and winter, and less power is needed to get the material on the field and to pull the spreader. Furthermore, manufacturers can give quicker service in the fall and winter months. The farmer has more time in the fall and winter. And this is important, too: lime has more time to act if it is applied in the fall or winter, because then there is a period of two to six months during which the neutralizing process can partially take place. That's especially important when the next crop is to be a legume, and it may mean the difference between success and failure. When lime is applied to meadows or pastures in the fall or winter, the soil movement that results from the action of thawing and freezing works the material down into the root zone. And that, Ewing, is today's lesson on soils--and the value of limestone.

JONES

A nice lesson it was too, Billy Ligon...and thanks for it. And don't forget--we owe our thanks to the man who did most in this country to promote the use of agricultural limestone--Edmund Ruffin, a great man.

ORGAN THEME: I GET THE BLUES WHEN IT RAINS.

JONES (on cue)

This is Ewing Jones, speaking for the Soil Conservation Service of the United States Department of Agriculture. Next week we'll bring you another story--a story of cover crops--another story in this series of "Fortunes Washed Away."

ORGAN: UP AND OUT.

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